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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON HURRICANE KATRINA AND TERRORISM,  
OCTOBER 13, 2005

¶1. On 10/13 the San Pedro Sula-based liberal daily "Tiempo" ran an op-ed by Sergio Ramirez entitled "Obscure Waters." "In his splendor days, Henry Kissinger was once asked if the United States should be compared to Rome. He responded that it should be comparable to Carthage, a distant empire, difficult to reach, seen then from Europe like a mirage from the other side of the Mediterranean Sea. The sense of the distance is certainly what has created a mental defense shield for the United States, an immense territory protected by the vastness of two seas."

"The wars that the U.S. have always fought are distant wars. Korea, Vietnam, Iraq are for the North American common citizen other peoples' territories and countries which they don't know anything about. They (North Americans) end up hating the wars fought far away when they feel overwhelmed by the number of corpses of soldiers who return in lead coffins, wrapped in the flag."

"The average U.S. citizen has been removed from catastrophe, or from the simple threat of catastrophe, except in the climax of the cold war when the nuclear warheads aimed at their territory, and until then they had only the slightest concern that something could end badly. But that threat ended up dissipating and with it the idea that the national security was necessary until the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Therefore, it was made brutally evident of the internal vulnerability of a great nation protected efficiently by afar, but badly defended from inside."

"Badly defended from the brutality of terrorism, and now, after the destruction of New Orleans, badly defended from the brutality of nature. The catastrophe continued to be far from reality of the United States when hurricane Katrina swept the gulf coast of Mexico, and the first person who didn't understand the situation was their very own president Bush and his immense bureaucratic apparatus, supposedly remodeled to face internal threats."

"The reverend Jesse Jackson said on television that Afro-Americans who lost their houses and their income in New Orleans should not be evacuated towards states such as Utah, or Oregon, as the federal authorities proposed because they were going to feel maladjusted in places different from their own culture."

"This is another kind of distance. The United States is well-viewed from outside, but is a sum of indifferent communities on the inside, and it is not necessary to go very far to prove the abysses of difference between them. The unhappy, abandoned people from New Orleans are the best proof, a proof that will multiply itself in the measure the obscure waters of tragedy continue to lower down."

¶2. "Tiempo" published an op-ed by Juan Zarandona entitled "New Orleans-Amsterdam." "The gravest issue during Hurricane Katrina was not that aid came little by little, or late as is asserted by mass communication. Truly the gravest issue was the rupture of the dikes. How is it possible that a grand city like New Orleans, situated below ocean level was protected by such weak defenses? How is it possible that half a million inhabitants were allowed the luxury of living, without efficient protection from the flooding Mississippi?"

"Holland, with 34,000,00 square km, all of it beneath sea level, has 16 million inhabitants. Situated opposite the coast of England and bordered by the North sea on the west. Two hundred kilometers of dikes protect Holland's territory from the sea. In many places, the base of the dikes reaches 80 and 100 meters wide, while they are often more than 30 meters tall. In addition to this, an extensive road joins the north and south. The maintenance of this stronghold is a national priority, on which depends the life of Holland's citizens."

"Prior to the disaster, any Dutchman would have thought New Orleans to be secure from the river and the estuary. Although the Mississippi is not the North sea, neither is it merely a brook. In school we all learned that it was one of the most plentiful rivers in the world."

"In a city as thriving as New Orleans, how could it not have enough money for the maintenance and improvement of its dikes? This is the question Europeans are asking, especially in Holland. Nevertheless, many people in New Orleans knew of this problem."

"This is why many of its inhabitants in their exodus from the city, hours before the tragedy, took one last look at the birthplace of Jazz. New Orleans was no Amsterdam."

"The inhabitants of Sacramento, California have been made aware of what might happen to them, following Katrina. The dikes of the Sacramento River resemble those of New Orleans far more than the Dutch dikes. We expect that the ugly Arnold Schwarzenegger, Governor of California, forgets about homosexuals and goes about putting sacks of sand where they belong."

Williard